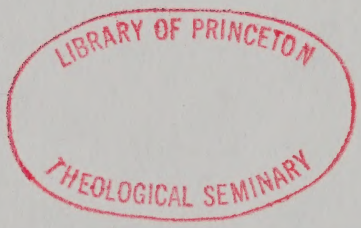

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THE CLAIMS OF JESUS CHRIST

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THEOLOGICALS

THE CLAIMS OF JESUS CHRIST

LENT LECTURES

BY
W. J. SPARROW SIMPSON, M.A.,
Vicar of St. Mark's, Regent's Park.

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THE KNOWLEDGE OF JESUS CHRIST

"Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away."—ST. MATT. xxiv. 35.

ON these Sundays in Lent we are to consider a few of the grounds upon which belief in the Divinity of Jesus Christ is based.

We begin to-day with His knowledge.

Our human knowledge may, with reference to time, be divided into three sections—the past, the present, and the future. Of the past and the present we may know a little ; not much it is true, but still a little. But of the future we can know nothing whatever, except what it has pleased or shall please the Almighty to reveal to us. Clever men in our own day have exhibited their ingenuity by describing social life as they think it is to be a hundred years hence, but such works are plainly works of the imagination, expectations which it is more than possible that time may entirely refute. For what is certain is, that the future is among the secrets of God, and that man cannot certainly foretell it.

Now, Jesus Christ ventured upon this province

which does not belong to man. On several occasions He foretold what course events should take after His own departure. These predictions of Jesus Christ have now been tested at the bar of history for eighteen hundred years, and we may find in their fulfilment one of the evidences which lead to belief in His Divinity. It is an evidence of a clear and obvious kind. It has led thoughtful men in this generation into the precincts of the faith. It may help to strengthen our own conviction and enable us to give to others one reason more for the faith which we possess.

Let us consider then some of the predictions of Jesus Christ.

I

First, then, a prediction about an obscure incident in His own experience.

He said, "Verily I say unto you, Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her."[1]

1. Recall the circumstances. It was in a little village nestled among the hills which surround Jerusalem; our Lord was resting in a house; a woman entered bearing a box of costly perfume; she poured the contents upon His head as He sat at meat. The guests remonstrated. It was

[1] St. Matt. xxvi. 13.

extravagant and wasteful. But our Lord defended the action. He reminded them that they had the poor always with them, and might do them good whenever they pleased; that the act was a sort of prophecy of His burial so shortly to occur, and then He added the startling sentence, "Wheresoever this gospel shall be preached in the whole world, there shall also this, that this woman hath done, be told for a memorial of her."

He declares that His gospel shall be proclaimed in all the world, and that in that gospel this incident should also be recorded.

2. Now, it may be said, and it has been said, that predictions of this kind tend to promote their own fulfilment. Jesus Christ, speaking to men who knew and revered Him, expressed a desire that this act should be remembered. What more natural than for His hearers to record the incident and proclaim it?

Yes; granting that His gospel would be preached in all the world, the rest may be easily included. But, at the time our Lord was speaking, there appeared no reason to suppose that His gospel would ever be known outside the limits of the Holy Land. For that prediction was spoken only two days before He died. It was a time when the cause of Jesus Christ seemed to be utterly lost. The shadows of death were already closing in upon Him; despair had filled the disciples' hearts. They had followed Him to what they felt would be their

ruin. They had echoed St. Thomas's melancholy language, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him." Close at hand were the powerful opponents of Jesus Christ, who could at any moment crush Him and His followers out of existence, and were only waiting opportunity to do it. Just before these words were spoken the priests had formed the resolution to destroy Him. Just afterwards they made arrangements with Judas to carry it into effect. Such was the hour by Christ selected, an hour of apparent hopeless failure, to foretell that His gospel should be preached in the whole world, and that this incident should find a permanent place within it.

3. And yet there was nothing in the incident itself to justify such anticipations. It was a simple act of courtesy, or of gratitude, or reverence. But there was no special brilliancy about it, nothing miraculous, nothing to single it out from a hundred other incidents which must have occurred in the experience of the Son of Man. It formed no necessary part of the message which He came to deliver. The gospel would have been, for aught we see to the contrary, as complete in all its essential characteristics if that incident had never been recorded.

And yet He, moving among the commonplace and the obscure, suddenly turns, declaring—this shall live! And lo! eighteen centuries have passed, and to-day it lives. You have seen on some dark

and clouded day a sunbeam strike through rifted cloud upon some field or lake, raising it into dazzling glory while all around remains in shadows; so did Jesus Christ with that obscure incident among the hills around Jerusalem. By one mighty word He has exalted the humble and meek, and placed that simple act of gratitude in the forefront of the annals of mankind.

And here, in modern England, when we read these words, or hear them read aloud in the course of the Church's year, we can scarcely help a feeling of astonishment, reflecting that we are doing what a Carpenter of Nazareth, ages ago, determined should be done, and that, if we refused to promote that fulfilment, other voices would arise to do this thing, and that no power exists on earth able to prevent its perpetuation down the centuries. So wondrously has He accomplished His own prediction: it shall "be told for a memorial of her."

II

Consider another prediction of Jesus Christ.

It is concerned with *His fellow-workers.*

He said, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."[1]

1. In proportion to the greatness of the work on which a man is engaged must be, to ensure success, the ability of those to whom He entrusts

[1] St. Luke xii. 32.

it. Now, who were the workers selected by Jesus Christ? They were fishermen; and not one was a person of extraordinary abilities. Doubtless they possessed a childlike simplicity and receptiveness which laid them open to strong impressions; but only consider how they hindered Him, how ignorant they were, how incapable of realizing His aims, how they misinterpreted what He said, put the poorest construction on the loftiest of His utterances, strove to make their way His rather than His way theirs, surrounded Him with their jealousies, disputes, and quarrels. If He left them for a few hours together, how they betrayed their incompetence, and fell all to pieces.

Such was the material with which Jesus Christ undertook to build.

2. And no one understood better than Himself the nature of that material. They felt instinctively that He had no need that any should tell Him, for He knew what was in man. And He frequently indicated their defects in the plainest terms. "I have yet many things to say unto you, but ye cannot bear them now."[1] And this at the close of His ministry. "Ye know not what manner of spirit ye are of."[2] They had no conception of the temper and ideal required of them. "Thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men."[3] "O faithless and perverse generation, how

[1] St. John xvi. 12. [2] St. Luke ix. 55.
[3] St. Matt. xvi. 23.

long shall I be with you, and suffer you?"[1] "Behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves,"[2] the helpless among the violent. Observe the strength of our Lord's illustration. We know the havoc which one wolf would create in a flock of sheep. What, then, would be the peril of sheep among wolves? "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, because Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." Babes they were, as simple and as ignorant, nay more, for the stupendous enterprise before them.

This is the strain in which Jesus Christ constantly refers to His followers' want of power.

And yet, for all that, what did He predict about their future? "Fear not, little flock," my poor little group of helpless followers, He implies—as a father's pity might speak of his helpless children—you whom I send as sheep among the wolves of this shrewd and pitiless earth, fear not, be reassured, for let appearances be what they may, notwithstanding all your powerlessness, "for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Eighteen centuries have passed since those words were spoken. And what is the verdict of history upon that prediction? Certainly Jesus Christ has given them a kingdom. Jesus Christ has enthroned those fishermen in the affections of all nations. He has made the names of Peter, James, and John household words, known where the names

[1] St. Luke ix. 41. [2] St. Luke x. 3.

of empires are ignored, and men read to-day on bended knee the writings of the son of Zebedee.

The mere fact of the survival of those men of Galilee would in itself be marvellous enough, considering what they were. But what makes it marvellous beyond all words is this—that He said it should be so. "It is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom." "I never hear those words," says a modern writer, "without a thrill of surprise, remembering what they were, and what He has made them."

III

Consider a third prediction of Jesus Christ. Closer to a man than his workers, stands the *work* in which he is engaged. What did Jesus Christ say of His own work? We recall at once the familiar saying, "I will build my Church, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."[1]

"My Church." What did He mean by that expression? A kingdom, a society, spiritual, world-wide, all-embracing, co-extensive with mankind, capable of including all temperaments and every nationality, placing men in a peculiar and near relationship with God, a kingdom over which Jesus Christ Himself proposed to be alike the lawgiver and the King.

A writer of our own age asks, "What put such

[1] St. Matt. xvi. 18.

thoughts into the mind of a working-man of Galilee?" That enigma will never be solved apart from the answer of the Church.

"I will build My Church!" Without means, without power, without friendship, without influence, by the mere force of My own unaided will, I will build a spiritual kingdom for the human race. Surely before that resolve the wildest dreams of empire and ambition sink into perfect insignificance.

"The gates of hell shall not prevail against it." He challenges the destructive, dissolving influences of the world to ruin that Society if they can.

That prophecy was spoken eighteen centuries ago. How stands the case to-day? The gates of hell, the evil influences, have certainly done what lay within their power against that Society which did not even exist when Christ was speaking. The Church has suffered from the world without, still more from evil influences within. The gates of hell have weakened it, often grievously hindered its extension and misused its power. The Church may say to the world, "All thy waves and storms have gone over me;" yet between the gates of hell, the powers of destruction, and the Christian Church, has stood an impenetrable barrier—the words of Christ no less mighty than the words of Him Who said—"Hitherto shalt thou go, and no further, and here shall thy proud waves be stayed."

IV

Closer to a man than his workers stands his work—still closer come *his words;* for words are the vesture of his thoughts, and a man's thoughts are part of his real self. What then did Jesus Christ predict about His words? This. "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away."[1]

1. Recall the circumstances. It was opposite the Temple. The disciples pointed with glowing enthusiasm to those massive buildings founded on the rock, an emblem of solidity and permanence. To this enthusiasm what was His reply? "There shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down." What, then, they might naturally wonder, should remain? His answer was, "My words."

2. Imagine a stranger passing by and overhearing these startling utterances. Suppose that, arrested by their strangeness, he paused to look, and wonder who the Man could be, calm framer of incredible assertions. The dialect would assure him that the speaker came from Galilee, the dress would show that He was poor, and further inquiry would elicit the fact that He had spent thirty years in a village carpenter's shop, and now came forth to inform the world that Heaven and Earth might be dissolved, but that His words should not pass

[1] St. Matt. xxiv. 35.

away. What impression would this have made upon a stranger at the time? At any rate the Gospel tells us what impression was made by some of the claims of Christ. Men said impatiently, "He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye Him?" Terrible language truly, yet under the circumstances not unnatural after all. For if they would not regard Him as more than human, were they not compelled to consider Him as less than sane?

3. Certainly, considered from the standpoint of to-day, Christ's prediction about His words is, to begin with, altogether *unique*.

A Roman poet in a far-sighted moment found confidence enough to say, "I shall not wholly die," and history has to some extent endorsed his utterance. Some mighty-mouthed inventor of harmonies may say that—

> "wise wordes taught in numbers for to runne
> Recorded by the Muses live for ay;"[1]

yet Spenser did not dare to individualize these generalities, and assert the immortality of his own writings. The masters of genius and of literature labour for permanence, they paint for eternity, they crave for lasting continuance, but they cannot assure themselves of the favourable verdict of time. "I have aimed high," writes one; "I have tried to do something that may be remembered. I have had the year 2000, and even the year 3000,

[1] Spenser, *The Ruines of Time.*

often in my mind."[1] But he adds rightly the inevitable, "and if I fail." The futility of confident assertions, the precariousness of such hopes finds expression repeatedly in the ablest of the writings of men—

> "O little bard, is your lot so hard
> if men neglect your pages?
> I think not much of yours or of mine,
> I hear the roll of the ages."[2]

And when the human mind hears that roll of the ages the insignificance of any, even the greatest human utterance, becomes overwhelming. The most brilliant writers will then say to the humblest with reference to his words—

> "Are mine for the moment stronger?
> Yet hate me not, but abide your lot,
> I last but a moment longer."

Do you imagine that when our great national poet wrote his tragedies, he had the remotest conception that centuries after he was dead his poems would become an English classic, translated into the other languages of Europe for the study of the civilized world? Or to go far higher, when the sweet singer of Israel sang as a lad among the Bethlehem hills, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want," or, as a broken-hearted man, cried in passionate penitence, "Have mercy upon me, O God, after Thy great goodness, according to the

[1] Trevelyan's *Life of Macaulay*, ii. 246.
[2] Tennyson, *The Spiteful Letter*.

multitude of Thy mercies do away mine offences," do you suppose that it ever entered into his wildest dreams that these hymns would be, after three thousand years, a treasury of devotion to the believing world? At any rate this much is certain —neither he nor any other man gave utterance to such a thought. No human being except Jesus Christ ever dared to say, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away."

Moreover, another thing is certain. You would not endure such language from any lips save Christ's. Why not? Plainly because such claims are *superhuman.* No power of man can determine beforehand the permanence of his reputation. If the ablest genius on earth were to adopt this claim of Jesus Christ, you would either smile or grow indignant, or regard it as a case of judgment perverted by exaggerated self-love. Some of the most esteemed writers of last century are already obscurities to-day. The fashions change. And any one who would predict the enduring popularity of any writer for five hundred years to come, would be certainly far more venturesome than wise. The words of man endure for a generation or two, and then they pass away; they are but local, or national, at the best. Look round the walls of any great library, and reflect how brilliantly gifted men threw the whole force of their thought and passion into biting epigram, or terse expression, or glowing passage of burning eloquence—all of which

nevertheless have practically passed away and are forgotten. Or realize the limited power of the words which actually survive. Might not pages of one of our greatest English writers be read to a popular audience in Germany or France, without any man discovering whose they were? Might not the poems of an Italian or a German master be recited before a popular English audience, and yet none of us know the author's name?

But listen—"Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Is there a popular audience, at any rate in civilized Europe, to whom it would be necessary to explain Whose words are those? The words of Jesus Christ have secured a position beyond and above all other words of man. The words even of Isaiah and the old prophets were after all but national until Jesus Christ gave them a world-wide fame. But mightier still are the words which He Himself has spoken. So gloriously is the prediction verified, "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away."

V

Beyond a man's words is the man himself. A man might conceivably believe in the permanence of his utterances, while admitting that his personality should practically pass away. The words of Isaiah live, but they are separated from all

personal claims. Did Jesus Christ say anything about *His own permanence* in after ages? Most assuredly He did. "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me."[1]

Jesus Christ is here estimating the influence which He will exert on earth after He is dead. Now that is a subject upon which the ablest of men will be modest. That Jesus Christ should, so long as He lived, exert a powerful influence upon the circle of those who loved Him, was natural. That His influence should survive Him, first in the form of bitter grief, then afterwards slowly mellowing into tender regret, so long as men remained who had seen the days of the Son of Man—this too is natural. But that His influence should grow ever wider and more popular without losing its intensity, however widely it has spread, this surely could not be reasonably anticipated when Christ was here. Still less was there, humanly speaking, any ground for supposing that men should come to Him, say their prayers to Him, call to Him across the ages, as "my Deliverer in Whom I trust, my Salvation, my Refuge, my Lord and my God." That men should put their trust in Him here and their hope in Him for the hereafter—surely if this had been suggested to the average man who met Jesus Christ and knew Him after the flesh, it would have seemed the height of impossibility. And yet all this is

[1] St. John xii. 32.

virtually involved in the prediction, "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me."

For nothing is more certain than the fact that Jesus Christ has exhibited that mighty power which once He was heard to claim. He has drawn all men unto Him. He estimated His influence, and He estimated it aright. Not from one nation, or one age, or one temperament, but from the East and the West, the North and the South, men have been drawn to Him. From all classes, high and low, rich and poor, one with another they have come to Him. The learned have been drawn to Him, although their human learning be greater than was His; they have been drawn to Him in order that they might be wise. The sinful have been drawn to Him, although He knew no sin; drawn to Him in order to be forgiven. The happy and the fortunate have been drawn to Him, although He was a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief; they have been drawn to Him in order from His lips to hear the deepest lessons of the meaning of the mystery of life. But the astounding fact is not only that He has done this thing, but that He employed language implying that it should be so.

VI

Let us sum up this great subject, and conclude. Men sometimes think that it would have been easier to believe in Jesus Christ if they had been

among His contemporaries and actually seen the face of the Son of Man. But surely it is no small privilege to see how, through eighteen hundred years, His predictions have been verified. The words of Jesus Christ have been tested by a long eventful history. And there is an evidence in this which was not accessible to those who saw Him live and die, an evidence singularly powerful, and one which must increase in power the older the world becomes.

Who, then, is this wondrous Being, who with His gaze upon the centuries unborn, lifts up an obscure incident, declares that it shall live, and places it securely in the front ranks of the annals of mankind; Who takes a few poor fishermen to be His fellow-workers, promises them a kingdom, and gives them thrones in the heart of the human race; Who founds an Institution, predicts its permanence, and lets the storms of ages beat on it in vain; Who declares that His own words are the most abiding realities on earth, declares it and actually makes them so; Who, yet more marvellous still, asserts that He Himself is the central attractive personality, not only to His age or to His nation, but to every human being to the last; asserts it, and proves Himself all He declared Himself to be? Yes, who indeed is this?

Doubtless your faith will answer—has answered already—this is the Son of God.

But without going so far as to say that that

conclusion is involved in these predictions of Jesus Christ, this much at least is certain. The knowledge of Jesus Christ was more than that of man. No man can read the future as Jesus Christ has read it, except God be with Him. If God can be anywhere traced in the story of mankind, He can be traced in the words of Jesus Christ, in the knowledge of the future exhibited by Jesus Christ. The knowledge of Jesus Christ is supernatural.

THE SUBLIMITY OF JESUS CHRIST

"Never man spake like this Man."—St. John vii. 46.

THAT was the impression which He made upon the officers sent to arrest Him. It is the impression which He has made upon men ever since. "Never man spake like this Man." Regarded as merely human, what impresses all men confronted with Jesus Christ is His loftiness, unearthly beauty, heavenly dignity, sublimity.

Recall one instance of the sublimity of His teaching.

He goes up on a hill, His disciples come to Him; beyond these are the people, and He opened His mouth and taught them. He set before them the ideal of the Christian character. The disciple must learn humility, penitence, meekness, mercy, must be pure in heart, must become a peace-maker—these are to be his characteristics. And the crowd were astonished at His doctrine. It has elicited men's admiration ever since. Whatever

we do in practice, at any rate in theory we recognize that this is perfectly sublime. It is clear that if we practised it heaven would be in our midst. The standard of human conduct will never be set on loftier heights than those upon which Jesus Christ has placed it. His teaching is sublime.

Or think of the sublimity of His life as exhibited for instance in His Temptation.

The Temptation of Jesus takes place on earth, yet nothing can be more unearthly. It occurs amid human surroundings, in the wilderness, in the Temple, on the hill; yet it transcends all human experiences. True that Satan is there and evil is suggested, but reflect what evil it is! True that the first temptation is through the body; but after all only to exercise His own gifts in His own behalf, to maintain His life for the sake of His work. True that the second temptation is to presumption; but only to an excessive reliance on the care of His Father which is in heaven. True that the third temptation is to ambition—but what ambition! Only the highest glory of God, and the greatest good of men. Temptations of this kind could only have suggested themselves to the most heavenly of human beings. Satan appears to understand that he must transform himself into an angel of light, must clothe the evil in the most refined and subtle aspects if he is to hope for success in the case of Jesus Christ. Moreover, here is no wavering, no uncertainty, no appeal to

God for help, only the answer of one sacred word, and all is ended.

Can anything in the way of temptation be more unearthly, more sublime? The experience of Christ in these forty days seems to claim what the Almighty claimed long before, "My thoughts are not your thoughts."

I

Contrast the sublimity of Jesus Christ with the sublimity of other men.

1. There is in every man a wonderful capacity for the sublime. It may be undeveloped, but it is there. And we are sometimes startled by its appearance in characters where we should least have looked for it. There are treasures of sublimity upon the earth. We are the fellow-countrymen of men who have wrought golden deeds, which make us proud to be of the same nation as they.

But there is another side to all this. It is fortunate if the doers of golden deeds do not compromise their sublimity by their subsequent career. We have seen heroic actions discounted by lamentable self-assertion, and the glory of great achievements tarnished by after failures.

Men of genius, the heroes of the world, the patriarch, the prophet, the priest, the kings of the older Scripture, even the Christian saints, seem reserved to teach us two things: the one how high

a man can rise, the other how low a man can sink. There was a man who wrote, "My soul is athirst for God, yea, even for the living God. When shall I come to appear before the presence of God?" That is perfectly sublime. And yet the same man wrote, "Set ye Uriah in the forefront of the hottest fight, and retire ye from him that he may die." That was despicable. It is ungracious to indicate the contradictions of the good: yet it is necessary to prove the superiority of the best. Neither in the one case nor in the other was David his ordinary self. In the one case he sank beneath himself, in the other he rose above himself. If the level of his habitual life was not the despicable, neither was it the sublime. He remains a crucial instance of the possibilities of the high and of the low which co-exist in our human nature.

Doubtless human sublimity is not always thus compromised by subsequent unworthiness. But what always happens is that men do not continue on those high levels. The wings of human aspiration quickly tire, and men descend again to the levels of the earthly in which we live. Of all Old Testament examples few exceed in sublimity the incident of Elijah on Carmel. He stands alone as the defender of the faith before hundreds of the prophets of infidelity, and before a nation whom he is to recall to the religion of their fathers. And the fire and enthusiasm of that man of God fitly call down fire from heaven on the altar of the

sacrifice. And we hear even at this day with a thrill of enthusiasm the cry of a nation's returning faith, "The Lord He is the God; the Lord He is the God." That is perfectly sublime. But look again: in the strong revulsion of feeling which follows upon that glorious event, all the prophet's strength is turned into exhaustion and despondency; he escapes for his life fearing the menaces of an angry queen; he feels he is no use, and has no power, is the wrong man for the work; not even the divine deed lately wrought through him can secure him against a failure of faith; let God call some one else more fitted for the task—as for himself, all he asks for is to be relieved of the burden and responsibility—"and now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am no better than my fathers."

Well, that is human—intensely human; who has not felt that despondency? It demands sincerest sympathy; but it is certainly not sublime.

2. Now turn and look at Jesus Christ. We are permitted to see Him under many and varied conditions. As a youth and in maturity, at work and at rest, in suffering and under severe provocation, in the crowds, in the street, at a wedding and at a funeral, with disciples, with one or two persons, and when alone. And what is His invariable characteristic? It is sublimity. He never for a moment sinks below it; yet He never rises above Himself. He is simply Himself, and to be Him-

self is, in His case, what it is in no other, namely, to be sublime. Each incident in His life is perfect. You never have cause to feel, this might have been better said, that might have been better done. Physically Jesus Christ was once for a few moments transfigured. Spiritually He is transfigured always abidingly. There was nothing that He touched that He did not glorify.

That is the first contrast between the sublimity of Jesus Christ and the sublimity of all other men. Human sublimity is like a momentary light in comparative gloom. It is even at the best no more than occasional, transient. But Christ's sublimity is invariable, permanent. Jesus Christ is always sublime. Just think of it!—a life always sublime. You recognize that it is true of Jesus Christ. Can it be said of any other human being that ever lived? No. Jesus Christ stands alone in His unearthly dignity. "Never man spake like this Man."

II

There is a second contrast between the sublimity of our Lord and the sublimity of men, namely, that His is unpremeditated, while theirs is carefully prepared.

Men can write sublime passages; but you must give them time. Nobody expects a poet to produce his best on the spur of the moment. That which is written to order is generally second-rate. You

must give him time. He may take weeks or months, or even longer. He cannot command the sublime, he must wait for it. He may write volumes of verse, and yet only be really grand and thrilling in one or two places here and there. It was said of one of the greatest masters of English in this century that if you asked him a question of importance in religion, he could never answer you off-hand. He must go into his study, and there in solitude and thought would write you such an answer as might live wherever English is spoken. But he felt that without reflection he could not possibly give you his best. The young Hebrew King, when his people asked him an important question, said, "Come again in three days." He must have time to prepare his answer. He must have notice of that question, and consult his advisers and reflect. It is true that he made a dreadful mess of it even then. He couldn't have done worse had he answered on the spur of the moment. Reflection does not secure sublimity, but you rarely get sublimity without it. He was right in believing that if an answer is to be excellent, it must be the product of careful and earnest consideration.

Now turn again to the sublimity of Jesus Christ. What impresses you is that His answers given on the spur of the moment are just as sublime as His most studied utterances.

Whenever, wherever, and to whomsoever they

are spoken, their character is always the same. To the devil in the wilderness, to the cynical magistrate in the Prætorium, to the chance appeal for help in the streets, to opponent, to strangers and to friends, to the questions of His disciples, to the suggestion of His mother at the wedding, to the mourning sister by the grave, the answers of Jesus Christ are in every case just as sublime as the words upon which He might have bestowed the lengthiest reflection.

One day He was at prayer. They came to Him and said, "Teach *us* to pray." And He gave them a prayer. And the world has adopted that prayer, and is convinced that it will never be surpassed.

There was a day in the life of Christ which is commonly known as *the Day of Questions*,[1] when the three great sections of His nation combined to entangle Him in His talk. There was the Herodian, that is, the politician; there was the Sadducee, that is, the sceptic; there was the Pharisee, that is, the religious man.

First came the politician. "Is it lawful to give tribute to Cæsar, or not? Shall we give, or shall we not give?"[2] We want a plain answer to a plain question. Tell us yes or no. The question seemed most simple, yet was most subtle. It was arranged with masterly skill. If He answers, "It is not lawful," then they will denounce Him to the

[1] St. Matt. xxii.; St. Mark xii.; St. Luke xx.

[2] St. Mark xii. 14, 15.

secular authorities as a man who stirs sedition. If He answers, "Yes, it is lawful," then they will denounce Him to the religious authorities, as a man who has no respect for the spiritual powers. Thus between the authority of the State and the authority of the Church, they feel themselves certain of a victory. And what was Christ's reply? Virtually this—There are two powers on earth, the spiritual and the secular, each have their claims and each their duties. "Whose is this image and superscription? They say unto Him, Cæsar's. Then saith He unto them, Render therefore unto Cæsar the things which are Cæsar's; and unto God the things that are God's. When they heard that they marvelled, and left Him, and went their way." The ages since have also marvelled whether or no they left Him and went their way.

Next came the sceptical, the Sadducee. He was resolved either to make our Lord deny the Resurrection, or else to accept an absurdity. A woman was married several times; she died childless. Whose wife shall she be in the Resurrection? It is a reduction to absurdity. What answer did Christ give? The difficulty arose from their human ignorance of two things—ignorance of the *power* of God, ignorance of the *words* of God. Of the power of God, for the future life will be no mere continuation of life under the same conditions as this. It will be purely spiritual. They shall be as the angels of God in heaven. Ignorance also of

the words of God, for had not God said, "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob"? At the time these words were spoken Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob had long since died. Yet the Almighty is declared to be their God. But He can only be their God on condition that they still exist. Possession presupposes existence. God possesses them: therefore they live. God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Relationship of possession between God and the creature involves the continued existence of those with whom God is so related. The very words involve the doctrine of man's immortality. "Ye therefore do greatly err." The Sadducees were silenced, and the people lost in admiration.

One section more remained. It was the religious, the Pharisee. He approached Christ with one of the burning questions of the day. "Master, which is the great commandment in the Law?" The answer might have been, "The great commandment is the law of circumcision, which distinguishes God from the heathen world." Or it might have been, "It is the observance of the Sabbath, or it is the law of Sacrifice." For each of these very much might easily have been said; each of these would have won warm approval and vehement opposition.

Very different was the answer of Christ. Rising far above them all, He gave an answer which every one of them must needs acknowledge to be true,

and which passed beyond the region of their disputes and bitterness.

Jesus said unto him, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."[1]

That reply of Jesus Christ drew even from His opponents words of admiration and approval. "Well, Master, Thou hast said the truth."

So closed that day of questionings. The three great parties of the period all strove, and we may be sure they did their best, to entangle the Son of Man by subtilty. Certainly they had time to prepare their questions, while to prepare His answers He had none. Certainly they had cleverness and learning and education and training in the highest schools of the day on their side, while He had "never learnt." Yet by the sublimity of His replies He put them all to silence. And be it remembered He did it without premeditation. Clever men have studied those three answers of Jesus Christ ever since. They have been subjected to the most searching scrutiny. And what is the outcome of the criticism upon them? Briefly it is this—we have never been informed how, given the circumstances, the men, and their opinions, those

[1] St. Matt. xxii. 37–40.

questions could have been more sublimely and more convincingly answered. That is the outcome of long and deliberate study of Christ's replies. But again, be it remembered, that those answers were given on the spur of the moment. They were spontaneous.

The fact is that the sublimity of Jesus Christ is shown in this, His *recollectedness*. Jesus Christ is never unprepared, never taken by surprise. Calm, serene, and matchless, He moves through life taking each event as it comes, always saying the noblest words, always doing the loftiest of deeds. With us it is the unexpected which happens. That is not the case with Jesus Christ. Nothing ever leads Him to change His plan. He never corrects the assertions of to-day by the experience of to-morrow. Never, like all other men, does He have reason to own, I was in error, let me profit by the mistake and begin again. Certainly never man spake like this Man.

III

To this Gospel presentation of the sublimity of Jesus Christ there is as it seems but one really serious *objection*. It may be said that such a picture is too glorious to be true, and can be nothing better than a fiction, a picture of the imagination.

In reply to that objection it may be asked, Did

you ever read a book which impressed you more with its sincerity, its faithfulness to fact, its truthfulness, than the Gospels? If ever veracity was written on the face of human writings, certainly it seems written there.

Moreover, while these men write Christ's character, *they describe their own character also.* We have a clear idea of St. Peter and St. John, of St. Matthew the publican, and of St. Thomas. We know their characters, their capacities very well. And we do them no injustice if we say that they were not competent to invent such a character as that of Jesus Christ.

And yet again, the character of Jesus Christ is described to us by four different writers, not merely by one. It is given to us from widely different points of view. But all alike agree in presenting to us a Person of the same marvellous sublimity. This is natural if they were drawn from life. It is inexplicable if it were a fiction.

Again, it is not too much to say that *men cannot imagine a perfect character at all.* We can recognize it when presented to us, but we cannot create it if we tried. Outside the Gospels there is no such thing as a perfect character described to us either in history or in fiction. The life of Jesus Christ has been dealt with respectively by poets, by gifted writers of imagination, and by some of the most saintly men. Sometimes they have allowed themselves to fill up the Gospel sketches, and make

Jesus say what is not recorded, or do what is not written of Him. Now what impression do these additions to the Gospel make upon the mind? Invariably they fall beneath the dignity of the Gospel Christ. Few men had a more splendid imagination than Milton, yet if you read the language which Milton puts on the lips of Jesus Christ, and then read the Gospel of St. John, you feel that even with the Gospels before him the poet's imagination could not keep Christ on the level upon which the Gospel places Him. Is it not impossible for the most gifted of men to add an incident to the Gospel narrative, which while new should be also not unworthy? We may rightly ask, what would Christ do under given circumstances, but we are quite sure that let the answer be as noble as you please, Christ would have done it incomparably better than our imaginings, and would have spoken words immeasurably more sublime.

Yet those men of Galilee were not greater poets than Milton. If they described a perfect character it was because they saw it before their eyes. They could not create, but they could say what they had seen.

I gladly borrow here the words of a Unitarian minister—

"I maintain that this is a character wholly remote from human conception. To imagine it to be the production of imposture or enthusiasm

shows a strange unsoundness of mind. I contemplate it with a veneration second only to the profound awe with which I look up to God. It bears no mark of human invention. It was real. It belonged to and it manifested the beloved Son of God."[1]

IV

If this analysis of Christ's sublimity be correct, the question immediately rises, What is the secret of this sublimity? The lowest reasonable answer is, that it comes from His unbroken communion with His Father which is in heaven. The vision of heavenly things is granted to every child of man, at any rate for a few moments in their lives. Like Jacob, you too have seen the angels of God ascending and descending on some vast altar stairs which slope through darkness up to God. Like Moses, you too have caught far-off some glimpse of the fringes of the glory of the Uncreated. Doubtless for us the heavenly vision becomes clouded partly by inherited sinfulness, or by personal misdeeds, or by contaminating influences of the world in which we live, and for us that vision of God is rather a memory of the past than a possession of the present.

1. But in the case of Jesus Christ all this is different—entirely different. He lives in unbroken

[1] CHANNING, *Works*, iv. 27.

intercourse with Heaven. "We speak that We do know, and testify that We have seen." He moves on earth, yet He lives in heaven, and He turns from communion with the Father on high to answer the questionings and perplexities of men. Hence that tone of certainty. Hence that wonderful unearthliness. Here is a partial, but only a partial explanation.

2. And further, surely this unearthly beauty of Jesus Christ is a revelation of God's beauty to men. If the heavens declare the *glory* of God, if the firmament showeth His *handiwork*, if nature declares His eternal *power* and godhead, yet still there is more in God than these to be revealed. There is a light which never shone on land or sea. It is only by a Person that the Personal God can be fully revealed. And the loftiness and the majesty and the tenderness and pity of the Uncreated One are revealed to us in the face of Jesus Christ.

The world may change, grow very wise, search into secrets of science, make discoveries hitherto unsuspected, but it can never outgrow the need of the revelation of God given in Jesus Christ.

"Thou art fairer than the children of men: full of grace are Thy lips, because God hath blessed Thee for ever."

THE ANGER OF JESUS CHRIST

"The wrath of the Lamb."—REV. vi. 16.

WE are most of us painfully familiar with the *excesses* of human anger. We have seen its unhappy effects. We have perhaps suffered from them in others; we have made others suffer from its exaggerations in ourselves. And reflection on these facts makes it not unnatural at times to wish that, when the committee of the passions was formed, this unruly member had been altogether excluded. For certainly it needs at times some Mighty One, as on storm-swept Galilee, to arise saying, "Peace, be still." It requires a strong presiding will to keep this turbulent passion in anything like respectable order.

Influenced by thoughts like these, men have sometimes proposed a new version for the Bible precept, "Be ye angry, and sin not." For the text seems to them a contradiction in terms. Who can recommend creatures such as we are to be angry? Is it not proverbial that anger is short madness?

Was not the prophet perversely mistaken when he said, "I do well to be angry"? Is it not written, "The wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God"? Or, again, "Anger resteth in the bosom of fools"? Accordingly they have proposed to insert a negative in the text and read it, "Be ye not angry, and so you will not sin."

Remembering the excesses of human anger, the proposal is natural, and yet it is mistaken. Anger, says an early Christian writer,[1] may arise from impatience, but it may also arise from zeal. In the former case it is an evil, in the latter a Christian grace. There was an anger which Eli needed, and was condemned for not possessing. And the anger of Phinees has been accounted unto him for righteousness among all posterities for ever more. There are occasions when not to be angry would be sin. You hear of some act of special brutality, and you are filled with deep indignation. And you know very well that if you were not angry it could only be for want of moral earnestness. In proportion to man's love of good must be his hatred of evil. Scripture speaks of the anger of God. Doubtless the anger of God is very different indeed from our ill-regulated or unregulated affection; but it implies the Divine aversion from evil. Anger is a necessary attribute of God, and there must be something corresponding to it in the character of every good man.

[1] St. Gregory the Great.

Anger, then, must exist in a perfect human character. It is not only a valuable but a necessary passion. It promotes the interests of justice. It is a storm that helps to cleanse the atmosphere in which we live.

In one sense there is too much anger among men; in another sense too little: too much of impatience, irritability, vindictiveness; too little of moral indignation. We are not as indignant as we ought to be with the evil in the world, still less with the evil in ourselves.

And because anger must exist, and yet there must neither be too much nor too little, it is clear that anger is *a test of human character.* Every day, almost every hour of the day, occasions arise when we can display our excess or our defect. Our anger shows what sort we are; and if any man offend not in word—if any man offend not in his anger—the same is a perfect man.

I

Let us apply this test to the character of Jesus Christ. To anticipate our conclusion, it is this: that the passion of anger existed in perfect balance in the character of the Son of Man; that in this supremely difficult matter, He exhibited neither excess nor defect.

Could Jesus Christ then be angry? Assuredly, if

He were a perfect character, yes, He could. Was the Son of Man ever angry? Yes, certainly at times He was.

1. On one occasion the anger of Jesus Christ was *shown in His looks.*

It was in the Synagogue on the Sabbath day, a time and place where men are on their best behaviour. There was present a man with a withered or paralyzed right hand. And the opponents of our Lord were watching Him to see whether He would cure the man on the Sabbath day. So He bade the man stand forth before them all, to plead for him a universal sympathy. Then He asked them whether if they had an ox or an ass fallen into a pit on the Sabbath, they would wait until the following day to pull him out? And He inquired further, whether it was lawful to do good on the Sabbath day: the better the day the better the deed. And they refused to answer Him. And He "looked round about on them with anger, being grieved for the hardness of their hearts."[1] What was it that roused His indignation? Obviously their inhumanity. A narrow theory had frozen the springs of human sympathy. To think that these men should suppose they were honouring God while exhibiting hard indifference to their fellowmen. Therefore He looked on them with anger. Could He rightly have done less? Must we not say: Had He not been angry, He had not been perfect?

[1] St. Mark iii. 5.

2. On a second occasion the anger of Jesus Christ exhibited itself in *action.*

He was going up to the Temple, which was to Him a link between earth and heaven, the visible reminder of spiritual verities, the place where God's honour dwelt, His Father's House, the House of Prayer. And what did He find? Buyers and sellers had invaded the Sacred Courts. The tables of the money-changers were there, and the seats of them that sold doves. The sounds of merchandise incongruously mingled with the hallelujahs, and questions of profit and loss with the hymn of praise. There seemed no sense of reverence—reverence without which no human being ever advances in the things of God—reverence, the want of which explains so much in every age. And none were impressed with a sense of incongruity, or, at any rate, no man raised his voice in protest against these irreverences. Therefore indignation filled the soul of the Son of Man. He made a scourge of small cords, possibly took a handful of the rushes with which the floor was strewn, took them, not as some have strangely imagined as a weapon of offence, but rather as a symbol of His authority, and moved forward to the cleansing of the Courts. He overthrew the tables of the money-changers and the seats of them that sold doves. He bade them take these things hence, and make not His Father's House a house of merchandise. From that anger every man departed. Thus the

sacred precincts were restored to the calm and peace which became them, suggestive of meditation and communion with the world unseen.

And be it remembered no man hindered Him. A crowd was there. The officers of the Temple would be there, and could easily have resisted this solitary wrath. But the justice of it impressed them; and those who knew Him best could but recall the sacred words, "The zeal of Thy House hath even consumed Me." [1]

3. Upon a third occasion the anger of Jesus Christ declared itself in *words*.

It was in His condemnation of the Pharisees.

Let me recall the passage [2] —

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

"Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

"Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye make clean the outside of the cup and of the platter, but within they are full of extortion and excess.

"Thou blind Pharisees, cleanse first that which is within . . .

"Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?"

[1] Cf. St. John ii. 17. [2] St. Matt. xxiii. 23–27, 33.

Are these the words of the gentle Son of Man, of Him Who spake as never man spake, of Him Who said, "Weep not": "Come unto Me;" His words, Who said that He was sent to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, recovery of sight to the blind, to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord, Who spake so lovingly that all men wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth? Most assuredly they are His; and they are the outcome of His righteous indignation. For consider what called them forth. He saw men satisfied with conformity to the externals of the faith while attempting no corresponding conformity within. He saw them exhaust their energy on outward matters which are, although not to be omitted, yet of comparatively small importance, while they neglected the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith. He saw men miserably, meanly satisfied with what they were, destitute of aspirations for nobler things, rather asserting their virtues than confessing their sins, without humility, without penitence, without self-condemnation and self-reproach—in a word, sunk in unreality. And He, knowing what that meant for a human soul, strove to awaken them out of sleep, and poured forth in terrible accents the full flood of His most just and righteous indignation.

II

Now let us reflect for a few moments upon some of the main characteristics of the anger of Jesus Christ.

1. And first consider the *causes* of His anger. What caused that look of indignation? It was unkindness. What caused that act of indignation? It was irreverence. And those words of indignation? It was unreality. The first was caused by wrong against others, the second by wrong against God, the third by wrong against themselves. Wrong against human brotherhood, wrong against God's Fatherhood, wrong against their own position as sons of God. These three—unkindness, irreverence, unreality—were the causes of the anger of the Son of Man. And remember what was *not* among the causes of the anger of Christ. This: injury inflicted upon Himself. One of His apostles being struck, answered back, "God shall smite thee, thou whited wall!" We thoroughly understand that sudden flash of human anger. Possibly we could easily have made a similar answer ourselves. But what said the Master under like trial? "If I have spoken evil, bear witness of the evil; but if well, why smitest thou Me?" They struck Him, they spat on His sacred Face, they crowned Him with the thorns, they covered Him with insult and derision, they scourged Him, they drew Him to prison and to death, they nailed Him down

upon the wood. These things therefore the soldiers did. But one thing they could not do: they could not make Him angry. All they extorted from Him was the gracious prayer: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do!"

Wonderful art Thou, O Son of Man, in the causes of Thine indignation!

2. Consider, secondly, the *direction* of His anger. If we study the anger of the Son of Man, we see that it was directed rather against classes of men than against individuals. Is there a solitary instance of the anger of Jesus Christ against an individual? It was directed against *all* the men in that Synagogue who identified themselves with unkindness. It was directed against *all* the traders who invaded the Temple Courts, many of whom, perhaps all, were strangers to Himself. It was directed against the Pharisees as a body so far as they shared the failings of their class.

Now to whatever drawbacks anger directed against a class of men may be liable, such anger is at least redeemed from personalities. Is it not a fact that human anger as a rule is directed rather against individuals than against classes? We are angry with the men rather than the evil. Christ was angry with the evil rather than with the men, and with the men only so far as they identified themselves with the evil.

Reflect on this: an anger absolutely redeemed from personalities.

3. Consider, thirdly, the *rareness* of the anger of Christ. Three times recorded in all His ministry. We cannot of course conclude that our Lord was not angered far more often than this, any more than that He did no more deeds of mercy than those recorded. But we may rightly infer that this is the proportion which impressed the men who wrote His life. They could easily recall numerous examples of His pity, His graciousness, His gentleness, His love; but they had rather to search for examples of His anger.

And yet, remember, as we saw last week, it is the most sublime of Beings of whom we speak. Men of lofty ideals, of deep earnestness, of high moral enthusiasm, must find in such a world as this countless occasions every day to rouse and justify their impatience and their indignation. Such men are naturally and proverbially impatient. The low ideals of others, the obstacles put in the way by other men's ignorance, perversity, blindness, and self-content, rouse them continually to flashes and excesses of indignation.

But when the Apostle who knew Christ better than any other knew Him, seeks a title for the Son of Man, what is the title which he selects? This: The Lamb. Doubtless it refers to His sacrificial work, no less certainly does it include His gentleness. What other mighty personage in history is there to whom you would dream of applying that title of exceeding gentleness? It is said of the

Almighty, "He is a righteous judge, strong and patient, although He is provoked every day." Is not that equally true of Jesus Christ?

O Thou Son of Man, wonderful art Thou in the rareness of Thine indignation!

4. Consider, fourthly, the *intensity* of His anger. Recall the words already quoted—"Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers! how can ye escape the damnation of hell?" Terrible words to read, what must they have been to hear, and to hear them spoken from His lips, and spoken against our brother men!

There was a man who stood by and heard those words, and saw the Face of Him Who spake them, and when he came to write the Revelation he describes men as calling on the hills to hide them and the mountains to cover them—and from what? From the Wrath of the Lamb! St. John had seen the indignation of Christ; and he can only apply to it the solemn words, "Who may abide the day of His coming, and who shall stand when He appeareth?"

5. But consider, finally, the *control* of His anger. On the first occasion it went as far as a look of indignation, and then it stopped. And even then it was mingled with sorrow, "being grieved for the hardness of their hearts," or, as it may be rendered, "He sympathized with them, He pitied their narrow-mindedness." It was anger modified by pity. On the second occasion it went as far as

action. But reflect what the action was—cleansing the Temple—symbolical and beneficial. On the third occasion it burst out in tremendous utterances; but even then there are tears in the Voice of Christ. For remember the words of infinite tenderness with which that condemnation concludes—"O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" The indignation of the Son of Man is melted and dissolved in grief.

Do we not now understand why St. John wrote that extraordinary phrase, "The Wrath of the Lamb"? That contradiction, that combination of apparent impossibilities, the perfect balance of gentleness with indignation, is realized in the character of Jesus Christ. It is wrath, but it is of the Lamb; it is gentleness, but He can be indignant. "The Wrath of the Lamb"—contradictory elements blended in perfect harmony together. In Him "mercy and truth are met together; righteousness and peace have kissed each other."

III

Such, then, are the characteristics of His anger. And surely nothing more god-like can be conceived? God Himself is described in Scripture as

One Who "made a way to His indignation," and yet "many a time turned He His wrath away, and would not suffer His whole displeasure to arise."

There is a perfect balance of the anger of Jesus Christ, never deviating into excess or defect; always found where it ought to be, and never "standing when it ought not."

Such perfection could only be found in a character entirely perfect. Tested by the passion of anger, that character emerges victorious, unique, divine.

O Thou wondrous Son of Man, I am drawn to Thee, and yet I am driven from Thee, drawn to Thee by Thy sympathy, driven from Thee by Thine anger. May I know the depth of Thy compassion, but may I never, never experience the intensity of Thine indignation!

THE SINLESSNESS OF JESUS CHRIST

"We beheld His glory."—St. John i. 14.

THREE great subjects have occupied our attention hitherto. Our Lord's knowledge, as shown in the way He read the future. The sublimity of His Intellect, as shown in the lofty levels upon which He always moved; the goodness of His Heart, as shown in His absolute control of the passion of anger. To-day we advance to a further, and, to a believer, most essential if difficult theme, that of Christ's freedom from sin. We are to consider the grounds upon which we believe in the sinlessness of the Son of Man.

Our subject naturally falls into two divisions—the first, what others said about Him; the second, what He said of Himself: the testimony of the men who witnessed His daily life and conversation, the testimony of His own innermost self-knowledge.

I

Consider first the witness of others.

The men of Galilee went up and down the Holy Land some two or three years in daily companionship with the Son of Man; they saw Him in the varied incidents of daily life, and in the changeful moods to which His human nature was subject; they saw Him in failure and success, in weakness and in grief, in pain and in anger, in displeasure and rejoicing, and they came away strongly persuaded that "He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth."

And the more intimately they knew Him the stronger that conviction grew. No man knew our Lord better than the Evangelist St. John, and he emerged from that sacred companionship utterly persuaded and convinced of his Lord's absolute perfection, able to say, "We beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth." Imagine that being said of any human being after three years' daily companionship!

And yet one solitary act or word, or even gesture or look, must have shattered that conviction and rendered it for ever impossible to describe Him in terms like these.

Companionship with human beings invariably reveals two things—their goodness and their defects. The more we come to know them, the clearer we see their goodness; but the light which reveals their

goodness cannot conceal their defects. Our admiration, our reverence, our love for them may lead us to exaggerate their goodness and minimize their defects; but what is certain is, that neither admiration, nor reverence, nor love ever induced a man to believe that those with whom he lived and moved were completely free from sin. We cannot say, "We beheld his glory!" No; this is not the verdict to which the utmost human partiality could lead us. It is far too lofty an estimate for human nature as we have ever known it. We beheld his goodness. Yes, but qualified by his defects. We need not enumerate them: they will betray themselves in the mere recital of his words and his actions. There is no need definitely to own that we beheld the traces of sin, every human being will certainly take that for granted without our imputing them.

The invariable sinfulness of man was no secret to St. John. Trained in severe regard for the awful holiness of God, he knew the teaching of Solomon, that there is none that sinneth not; he himself declares most firmly that "if *we* (any one of us, Christ excepted) say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." And yet no less firmly did he make the solemn declaration—"We beheld His glory, the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

The witness of the Bible on this point is that

Christ took the likeness of sinful flesh, but not its sinfulness; that He was like unto us in all things, sin alone excepted; that He was Jesus Christ the righteous, that He was holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners; that He did no sin, neither was guile found in His mouth.

II

We have considered the impression which His character made upon others; let us now hear His judgment upon Himself.

Here, however, an objection is sometimes raised. Did not the Son of Man expressly decline the epithet "good"? When addressed by the young Ruler as good Master, did He not at once reply, "Why callest thou Me good? There is none good save one, that is God."

The force of that reply will depend on the frame of mind in which our Lord was approached. The young Ruler might have uttered the term "good Master" *thoughtlessly*. If he did, the reply will mean—"You have called Me good, but you did it without reflection. You have turned a solemn attribute into an empty compliment. You did not measure the meaning of your words. A thoughtless use of language involves an unreality, an insincerity, a want of truth, which is at once in itself a grave defect, and the cause of many ills. To avoid falsehood it is necessary to avoid exagger-

ation, for exaggeration is the parent of lies. You spoke, but you did not think. Had you thought, you would not in your present state of knowledge ascribe to Me the epithet 'good.' For while you believe, and rightly, that none is good save God, you do not know or believe enough about Me to warrant the ascription to Me of the moral glory which that phrase implies."

If, on the other hand, the young Ruler spoke in sober *earnestness*, if he had actually seen something of the moral glory of the character of Jesus Christ; if he was paying a tribute of sincere admiration and reverence when he called our Saviour "good," then our Lord's answer will mean—"You have called Me good, can you realize what that attribute involves? None is good save one, that is God. Let Me lead you from the truth you know to the truth which as yet you know not; from acknowledgment of My goodness rise to recognition of My Divinity."

Thus if the Ruler spoke without reflection the answer is a rebuke, if he spoke in earnest the answer is an instruction; but neither in the one case nor yet in the other does it mean that our Lord declined the title, or that His self-judgment was hurt by the epithet "good." He does not decline the name, but inquires into the seriousness with which it was given.

The question thus remains—Did Jesus Christ ever claim to be actually free from sin?

1. Certainly He did. He declared it *before His contemporaries* when He said—

"Which of you convicteth me of sin?"[1]—sin, that is, here as elsewhere in the New Testament, moral evil in the fullest sense—not, as some have thought, falsehood or ignorance or mistake.

Our Lord here challenges His contemporaries to point out anything evil either in the words which He has spoken, or in the actions which He has done. Just think! What other human being that ever lived dare confront the men who knew Him with a claim like that? Moreover the claim means more than freedom from *outward* transgression. For no man has a right to make that claim if he is conscious of wrong within. An honest man will never say, "which of *you* convicteth me," if his own *heart* condemns. To do that would be manifestly only to take advantage of other men's ignorance. Human imperfection must always say, "If you cannot convict me of sin, it is only because you cannot read my heart. And where you cannot convict me, conscience compels me to convict myself." A student of the human countenance once studied the face of one of the best and wisest teachers the world has known. He declared that that face betrayed the presence of many vices. The bystanders laughed the man to scorn. But the teacher gravely answered—"You have no cause to laugh; I acknowledge within myself the germs

[1] St. John viii. 46 (R.V.).

of all those vices which are thus said to be written upon my features." He then, one of the wisest and best of men, dared not utter the challenge, "which of you convicteth me of sin?" Either our Lord was what our lips refuse to put in words, or else He lived in the serene unconsciousness of evil within.

2. But the claim of Christ to be free from evil does not rest on one disputed phrase. It was repeated several times. He claimed it a second time *in reference to the Evil One*—"The prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me."[1] The powers of evil are drawing near, and our Lord calmly declares that there is nothing in Him which Satan can claim as his own, no vein of evil there, no cloud of evil memories. "Hath nothing in Me"! Think of it! Nothing: nothing which can bring Him under the dominion of death, which reigns over every man.

"If *we* say that we have no sin," says St. John, "we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Yet he recorded reverently and believingly the words of his Master . . . "hath nothing in Me."

"Hath nothing in Me." Illustrate this from our Lord's temptations. The narrative of those temptations must have come from His own lips; none but Himself could know His innermost experience. And the narrative confirms these words. There is temptation, but no—surrender,

[1] St. John xiv. 30.

shall I say?—nay, not even wavering. "The prince of this world came and did his worst, but he hath nothing in Me."

3. The claim was made another time *in reference to His Father in heaven.* Our Lord said, "I do always those things that please Him."[1]

His communion with the Father in heaven is clouded by no painful memories, troubled by no sense of discord and opposition. He lives in the perpetual sunshine of the Father's approval. His actions are those things that please Him. And this is the case "always," invariably, without exception. Think of it. "I do always those things that please Him." What must imperfect human nature say? Can it say, "I do sometimes those things that please Him?" Can it even say as much? Remembering how our best actions are compromised by lower motives, can we dare to say that the unqualified approval of the Eternal rests on any one of these? When we make reference to our Father which is in heaven, our sinful nature is compelled to say, "Thou hast set our misdeeds before Thee, and our secret sins in the light of Thy Countenance." He, and surely He alone, could calmly say, "I do always those things that please Him."

4. The claim was made once more *in reference to His Mission.* Among the last words of Christ are these, "I have glorified Thee on the earth; I

[1] St. John viii. 29.

have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do."[1]

The work which God has given to any human being is threefold—the service of God, the service of man, the discipline of self. Of which of these three will any man dare to say, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest me to do?"

Our Lord is here comparing together the ideal of His life and its realization, His life as it ought to be, and His life as it actually is, and—oh wonderful!—He can see no difference. The pattern and the fulfilment exactly correspond.

The best of men must approach the Throne of God in the guise of humble-minded penitents: Jesus Christ approaches as a conqueror.

III

Such are the claims of Jesus Christ to freedom from evil. But to realize the full force of the claim it is necessary to add certain considerations.

1. And first, Bear in mind *the keenness with which He detected evil in others.*

In the presence of Christ evil is always detected, drawn out into the light, judged, condemned, repudiated. Remember His indignation over human unkindness, irreverence, unreality. Recall how He answered an Apostle, "Get thee behind Me, Satan;

[1] St. John xvii. 4.

thou art an offence unto Me." St. Peter saw no harm in the proposal, our Lord saw that it originated in the Devil himself. Reflect again how Christ at once laid His hand on the weak point in the Young Ruler's character—"One thing thou lackest," and it was even so. Are we not certain that if Christ met us anywhere, that searching gaze would in a moment detect the very wounds that shame would hide, that He would say, thou ailest here, and here, and here?

Well, then, was that searching scrutiny never turned inward upon Himself? He Who read so keenly and so truly the characters of other men, did He never read His own? Does not the fact that evil wherever it existed was detected, assure us that it would have been detected in a moment had it existed within? Is not the clearness of His moral judgment on others itself the evidence of a heart pure within?

2. And secondly, remember *the standard of right and wrong by which the Saviour judged.*

Nothing can exceed its loftiness, its sublimity, for that standard was perfection. No one will ever raise the moral ideal higher than it was raised by the Son of Man. He is satisfied with nothing less than utter self-surrender to the Will of God. He even spoke that awful sentence, "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Perfect as God! We tremble as we hear. What else can human weakness do,

facing the moral ideal taught by the Son of Man?

Here, then, is the standard whereby He judged Himself. Certainly if the least shadow of evil had rested on the heart of the Son of Man, then by that standard of perfection it must have been detected and condemned.

3. And thirdly, remember our Lord's *nearness to God.* It is a universal law that the better a man becomes, the more deep becomes his consciousness of sin. It is not the worst of men, it is the best who repent most deeply. It is they who fain would serve Him best, who are conscious most of wrong within. The noblest of God's servants on this earth have uttered their self-condemnation in terms so severe that the world can only regard the language either as exaggerated or else as a proof of unusual youthful depravity. It shows neither the one nor yet the other. What it does show is that they more than other men have come to understand something of the character of Him before Whom the very angels veil their faces. It is an Isaiah who cries, "Woe is me, for I am undone, for I am a man of unclean lips!"[1] It is a Job who exclaims, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes."[2] That is to say, the nearer a man lives to God the deeper must be his

[1] Isa. vi. 5. [2] Job xlii. 5, 6.

sensitiveness even to those minor forms of evil which do not at all disturb the conscience of the average man.

An essential element of human prayer is the cry of penitence, the prayer to be forgiven. It is impossible to conceive of human prayer from which the element of repentance is long excluded. Even our *Gloria in excelsis* includes a *Miserere*. The highest accents of human praise are rapidly subdued into the humble petition for mercy and forgiveness. Being what we are it must be so.

Now no man ever lived so near to God as Jesus Christ. If then He were but imperfect man we should find upon His lips the language of a penitence more heartrending than the *Miserere*, more profound than the *De profundis*.

Yet look at the prayers of Christ. The language of contrition is never there. He can say, "If ye being evil,"—never, "If I, or we." He can say, "Ye must be born again,"—never we. He can say, "When ye pray, say, Forgive us our trespasses," but that prayer was for His disciples' use and not His own. He prays *for* His disciples, but never *with* them. This is the real solitude of Christ—that caused by His moral isolation. Christ strongly commends for other men the prayer, "God be merciful to me a sinner," but He never breathes one single accent like it. Christ never repented, not in Gethsemane; no, not even on the Cross. He said indeed, "Father, forgive *them;*"

what He did not say, surely because He could not, is "Father, forgive *Me*."

Once believe that the Son of Man stood wholly above the level of human transgression, and all this becomes perfectly natural. But it is nothing less than monstrous without it.

IV

We believe, then, that the Son of Man passed through a perfectly sinless development; that He was like unto us in all things, sin alone excepted; that He was literally holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners; that His childhood was without self-will, His youth without reproach, His manhood blameless; that as He passed through each stage of human life He sanctified it.

Now to say that, is to say that He is *unique*. Never before, never since, has there been a sinless Son of Man. We have no hope that the human race, be its progress what it may, will ever produce a sinless one again. There have been other founders of religions beside Jesus Christ, but none of these have ever claimed for themselves, nor have their followers in the loftiest hours of admiration, ever claimed in their behalf, the attribute of freedom from offence. No one ever dreamt that Mahomet was free from sin. Buddha frankly owns that he passed through struggle out of darkness into light. The founder of the religion of the Hebrews however

excellent, must recognize his human imperfections when he drew nigh to the holy ground. There is, in fact, an unqualified determination on the part of the human race never to believe in the sinlessness of any child of man; and if that determination has yielded in the case of Jesus Christ, it is only because it is overpowered by the evidences of His moral perfection.

Yes; among all the sons whom the human race has brought forth, there is only one upon whose stainless purity the intellect and heart of the world can rest with unqualified satisfaction and revering love. It is He Who eighteen hundred years ago was born of a woman.

Who then is this?—the one stainless among the millions of the unclean.

We, like St. John, have beheld His glory. We, like the Ruler, salute Him, "Good Master, Thou alone art good." And when He answers, "Why callest thou Me good? there is none good save One, that is God." "O Thou Son of Man"—we answer—we accept the inference: "for to say that Thou art sinless, *is* to say that Thou art more than man."

THE CLAIMS OF JESUS CHRIST IN REFERENCE TO THE HUMAN RACE

"Jesus said unto her, I am the Resurrection."—ST. JOHN xi. 25.

EVERY attentive reader of the New Testament must be impressed with the personal claims which Jesus Christ urges upon the human race.

1. There is the claim to be the Judge of the human race. He said, "When the Son of Man shall come in His glory, and all the holy angels with Him, then shall He sit upon the throne of His glory, and before Him shall be gathered all nations, and He shall separate them one from another."[1]

Our Lord is here contemplating the final Day; and upon the throne of universal judgment whom does He see? Is it you? It is Himself.

He, the Son of Man, is constituted Judge of all mankind, not only of one tribe or nation, but of all mankind. And to be judged by Him is the same

[1] St. Matthew xxv. 31, 32.

thing as to be judged by God. If He says, "Come, ye blessed," it means everlasting life: if He says, "Depart from me," it means exclusion from God. His decision is final, there can be no appeal; it cannot be revised, still less reversed, for every soul in its innermost self actually is that which He pronounces it to be. Such was the claim. Let us reflect upon it. Think what gifts are required to form a perfect judgment upon any single human being, what to pass perfect judgment upon the entire human race!

Think of the varieties of standard by which men must be judged. For a man must be judged by that he had, not by that which he had not. The standard of judgment must be one thing for a Christian, another for a Jew, and another for a heathen man. Even among Christians the standard practically varies between one nation and another, between home and home. The standard of one Christian home is not the standard of another. That is doubtless due to faulty traditions and to ignorance; but ignorance may be either inevitable or self-willed. And what wisdom it would demand to determine which—and how far!

Think again of the wisdom required to determine not only the actions but the motives of men, to weigh the force of their temptations, to disentangle the intricate confusions of right and wrong in any single human heart. To pass a perfect judgment upon all these, it would be necessary to know the

character, the temperament, the opportunities, the antecedents, the education, the inherited nature of the individual man, to enter the chambers of his mind and to know him better than he knows himself. Think of such a knowledge extended across the human race!

Moreover, to pass a perfect judgment it would surely be needful that the judge himself should be absolutely perfect. Human judgments are at best approximations to the truth (often exceedingly imperfect), simply because we ourselves are most imperfect. To pass a perfect judgment needs a perfect judge, free from all the infirmities, the partialities, the imperfections by which human judgment is perpetually warped and misdirected. That is to say, that a perfect judgment requires a power, a wisdom, and a goodness superior to those possessed by man.

And yet Jesus Christ claimed to be the Judge of the human race. He sees millions and millions of His brother men coming before Him for final decision upon their characters, and He is not afraid. He has no misgivings. He never says, Who is sufficient for these things? He never suggests that before He has only begun to reckon, cases may easily arise which must be reserved for some higher court of appeal. It is to Him the most natural, inevitable thing in the world that the human race should come to Him for judgment. And yet, He who made that claim was known on earth as the

Carpenter of Nazareth. Doubtless men have made great claims. Has any other human being proposed to be the final judge of the human race?

2. A second claim of the Son of Man is to be the Consoler of the world.

He said, "Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest."

We are all very familiar with those gracious words, perhaps the most gracious that ever came from His lips, but their graciousness cannot conceal from us the fact that they involve a singularly lofty claim.

For whom does He invite? It is the weary and heavy laden. The suffering, the sinful, the sorrowful, those to whom life gives no further promise; the downcast, the lonely, the bereaved, humanity in its distress, when most it needs and least can find a lasting consolation. These are they whom the Son of Man invites.

And to whom does He call them? Is it to God? Does He say as a prophet said, "In the time of your tribulation, turn ye to God"? No. It is not "Turn ye to God"—it is "Come unto Me." It is "*I* will give you rest." He believes Himself to be the remedy for all the sorrows of mankind.

3. A third claim of the Son of Man is to be the Resurrection.

There was a burial-place near Bethany, where it is said that Jesus wept. We have all been impressed in our early days by those tears of the Son

of Man at the grave of Lazarus. But, after all, what more natural than that expression of human sympathy! Any one of us could have done that. What startles and amazes us is not that this Son of Man shed human tears, but that He said, "I am the Resurrection." While others expressed their belief in a life beyond the grave, He claimed positively to be that for which others hoped. Men sometimes wonder how St. John, who wrote the Gospel, could remember those sayings of Christ so many years after He was gone; but surely it were more wonderful to suppose he could forget. The startling character of those claims was itself sufficient to imprint them indelibly on all who heard. Had we stood beside a human grave and heard one claim to be the Resurrection and the Life, whatever we might think of the claim it is certain we could never forget it. There was a monarch who once said, "The State—I am the State." Men have fiercely or sarcastically repudiated that assertion, but they cannot forget it. Now the Son of Man claimed to be the Resurrection; claimed to be for the human race the source of their immortality. "As the Father hath life in Himself, even so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself. I will raise Him up at the last day."

"I am the Resurrection!" tremendous words. And He who uttered them was *Himself* within a few days afterwards to expire upon a cross and lie in a grave. Yet confronted with the near approach of

an experience which was not concealed from Him, He spoke that awe-inspiring phrase, "I am the Resurrection."

Now it is when confronted with death that human nature feels its want of power. There at any rate all human claims are hushed—like the lying lips,—they are put to silence in the grave. We fall back at such an hour on the power of God. He is faithful that promised. God is everything, and man is nothing. We can say, "God will raise him, God will give him life." But Christ calmly uttered the appalling claim, "I will raise him up at the last day. I am the Resurrection."

4. Add to these one further claim of the Son of Man. It is to be the Lord of the human heart. He said, "If any man love father or mother more than Me, he is not worthy of Me. If any man love son or daughter more than Me, he is not worthy of Me."

That sentence points out the broad distinction between Christ as a teacher and every other teacher of the human race.

The teacher draws attention to his *teaching*. Jesus Christ draws attention to *Himself*.

(1) The human teacher of religion must invariably be overwhelmed by the contrast between the majesty of his message and his personal unworthiness. It must be to him increasingly amazing that the Almighty should have entrusted a message so lofty to a messenger so mean.

When St. John the Baptist is asked, "Who art thou, what sayest thou of thyself?"—his answer is, "I am a voice—that is all—a mere instrument, a channel of communication, a messenger: nothing more. Forget the messenger, the all-important matter is the message."

The human teacher might say, "He that loveth father or mother more than my message is not worthy of that message, because it is God's truth." What he cannot say is, "He that loveth father or mother more than *Me*, is not worthy of Me." Such a statement on merely human lips would be at once a blasphemy and an absurdity.

(2) Now contrast the position assumed by Jesus Christ. He continually draws attention not to His teaching, but to *Himself*.

Recall His words—"I am the Light of the World; I am the Vine; I am the Door; I am the Good Shepherd; I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; I am the Living Bread; I am the Resurrection"—*personal* claims every one of them. He calls attention to Himself, He comes to reveal Himself.

So here, "If any man love father or mother more than *Me*, he is not worthy of Me." It is a personal claim, and of the very loftiest order. He demands a personal affection—the first place in every human heart—a love more tender and more unreserved than that of the most natural and sacred human relationship. And to give to any other human

being the preference, a larger devotion than to Himself, is to be unworthy of Him. Men are not worthy of Him except on the condition of unqualified self-surrender, yielding to His dominion the very throne of their hearts. Think of the magnitude of the claim, the priceless value He regards Himself to be to every one of the sons of men if it is only on that condition that men become worthy of Him.

These are among the claims of the Son of Man. I say these are *among* His claims, for of course He makes many more demands upon mankind beside these. But these are perhaps among the most conspicuous. He claims these four things—to be the Judge, the Consoler, the Life, and the Lord of men.

Now it is impossible to do justice to those claims of the Son of Man without remembering the awful *goodness* of Him who uttered them.

Upon the last three occasions we have attempted to study the moral character of the Son of Man. And what have we seen? We have seen sublimity. He moved habitually upon the loftiest heights of human thought, in perpetual communion with God, and from these heights He never even for one instant descended. Always in the unexampled glory of His sublime career He is like the High and Holy One that inhabiteth eternity, whose Name is Holy.

Remember too how every human virtue is found in Him, and in its perfectly true proportion.

Recall His wonderful humility. Reflect how He shrank from anything approaching unreality or exaggeration—how He refused a title thoughtlessly given—"Why callest thou Me good?"

Remember more especially His burning love of truth—"To this end was I born, for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the Truth." Is not that character a guarantee of the veracity of His claim?

Surely the more tremendous the claims appear, the more impossible it is that He, being what He was, could make them, unless they were the simple truth?

The moral grandeur of that character must have utterly excluded all but that of which He was absolutely convinced.

It is in the light of this exceeding moral glory that the claims of the Son of Man should always be considered. This character and these claims are found in one Person. They are found together they must be regarded together.

His claims are lofty; His character is, if possible, loftier; His claims are unearthly, but so is He.

And I suppose that there can be no doubt that it is the unearthly beauty of His character which, to the conscience of humanity, has justified these claims.

Now of course every human being is compelled to adopt some attitude towards these things.

1. There is one attitude adopted which may teach us many important lessons. Men have attempted to effect a divorce between Christ's character and Christ's claims; accepting the one, while rejecting the other. They have believed that He was good; they have at the same time denied His claims. That only shows how strongly the moral glory of Christ affects the human heart, when men who reject His claims are reluctant to deny His goodness. But that position cannot be consistently maintained. It does more credit to men's hearts than to their heads, to their emotions than to their reason. For, reflect! If He called Himself the Judge of the human race, when after all He is not, but must Himself be judged among the number; if He invited humanity to Himself, when He should have directed them to God; if He claimed to be the Resurrection, when He cannot raise the dead; if He demanded a throne in the heart of humanity which belongs to no mere human being, no, nor angel, nor creature, but to God alone—then what becomes of the moral goodness of Christ? If He is neither Judge, nor Consoler, nor Life, nor Lord of the world, and yet asserted that He was all these, then He stands convicted of —we shrink from pronouncing the words, yet they must be pronounced—intolerable presumption. If the claims of Jesus Christ be rejected, His

goodness also fades away into the darkness; if not literally true they are the most lamentable aberration of the human mind. Either Christ is what He claimed to be, or else He is less than good.

The Unitarians, at the beginning of this century, lavished the most glorious titles of reverence on the moral sublimity of Jesus Christ. They proclaimed Him freely and frankly to be literally free from sin. But they rejected His claims. What has followed? The stern demands of reason have made themselves heard at last over the inconsistencies of that position. And at the close of the century they who began by denying His claims, have already ceased to believe that He was perfectly good. And they are surely right. The claims and the character of the Son of Man stand or fall together. They who reject the one will not long retain the other.

But when both have been rejected, hope must still remain: for the human heart must always, still in proportion to its own goodness, be drawn to admire and to reverence what is morally the best. And still that peerless character of Jesus Christ will assert its claims to the reverence and devotion of mankind. Then the conflict begins again. Repelled by His claims, but attracted by His goodness, men must own His fascination even while still reluctant to accept His claims. Must not His goodness ultimately triumph, and the victory at last remain with love?

2. Have not those claims been greatly *verified* during the eighteen hundred years since they were spoken?

He claimed to be our Judge. Well, has He not, in a real sense, judged men ever since? Is not our inward attitude towards Him the truest test of what we are? From age to age have not men come before Him, either for condemnation or for approval? Is it not natural to believe that He Who has already exercised this mighty function over the secret thoughts of men, will some day complete that judgment upon us which He has already spoken to our consciences within? It is the judgment already exercised by Him upon the world which justifies belief that He will occupy the throne of judgment at the last.

He claimed to be our Consoler. And certainly that claim has been marvellously verified. It is true of Him in a sense in which it is false of all other, that He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows. The weary and heavy laden have taken Him at His word, and found His promise did not fail. The cry of the oppressed, the heart of the bereaved, the appeal of the suffering and the sad, the confession of the sinful—all these from all parts of the heavily laden earth have gone towards Him and found unfailing peace.

You yourself, doubtless, can point to hours in your innermost personal experience when the Son of Man brought you unutterable consolation.

He claimed to be the Resurrection. Do you say that lies entirely in the future, and cannot now be verified? But, stay. Has not the Son of Man proved already to be a moral and spiritual Resurrection? Has He not often said—"Young man, I say unto thee, Arise"? and he arose from moral death, and lived. Which is the harder work, to renew the heart or restore the body? If He has done the greater, shall we not believe He can do the less?

He claimed to be the Lord of the human heart. Well, must we not acknowledge that wherever that claim has been admitted, there the human heart begins to exhibit its sweetest and noblest grace? Where among human characters do we find the highest forms of moral beauty? Is it not among those who have accepted the dominion of Jesus Christ?

We believe then in these claims of the Son of Man in reference to the human race.

"I believe that Thou wilt come to be my Judge."

I believe that Thou art the Resurrection and the Life, and the true Consoler of human grief.

I believe that the throne of my heart by right is Thine.

O God, give me grace to yield Thee that dominion, which I acknowledge to be rightfully Thine.

THE CLAIMS OF JESUS CHRIST IN REFERENCE TO THE FATHER

"That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father."—ST. JOHN v. 23.

WE come to-day to the last and greatest of the claims of the Son of Man, that for which all our previous considerations have gradually prepared the way—that claim which to a Christian is of supreme momentousness, the claim of equality with God.

There are three series of the claims of Jesus Christ.

The first, His claim in reference to evil, that He was entirely free from it.

The next, His claim in reference to mankind—that He is the Judge, the Consoler, the Life, and the Lord of the human race.

The last, the claim in reference to God, the claim of Divinity.

I

He claimed, then, first of all, to be *the only way of approach to the Father.* He said, "No man cometh unto the Father but by Me."[1] In what sense does He employ that phrase? If the words "by Me" were intended to express nothing more than "by the doctrine which I teach," this substitution of the personal for the doctrinal would be to the mind of a Jewish teacher at once misleading and irreverent. Nothing is more rigorously maintained by the prophets than the distinction between themselves and their message. No man cometh unto the Father but by my message, by means of the truth which I among others am permitted to convey—this assertion of the importance of his communication any Jewish teacher might readily have made. But when our Lord deliberately departed from the conventional human expression, and substituted words which would naturally be chosen if He meant to urge a personal claim—we have a right to assume that the meaning is identical when the language is significantly different.

On one side He places the human race, on the other He places God; and between them both He places, as the connecting-link, Himself. He is the bridge between the creature and the Uncreated, between the human and the Divine, between earth

[1] St. John xiv. 6.

and Heaven. He is the only way by which humanity can draw near to God. That is His claim.

Now, if Jesus Christ be nothing more than man, He can have no conceivable right to make this claim. For no mere son of man can occupy an intermediate position between God and the human race. The most spiritually-minded that ever lived cannot say to the least spiritually-minded—"I am the Way; you cannot come unto the Father but by Me." That claim immediately raises the question, if Jesus is the only way of approach to the Father, by whom does Jesus Himself approach the Father? And if Jesus Himself has discovered some other way, why is not that same way open to all mankind? If direct approach to the Father is possible for one member of the human race, it is possible for them all: and the language of Jesus Christ becomes unreasonable. Just reflect on the appalling magnitude of the claim. He sees the entire human race in their endeavour to draw near to the Throne of uncreated life and glory. And He solemnly declares that God can only be reached through Himself.

If Jesus Christ is what the Church believes Him to be, then the language of this claim is perfectly natural. If He is indeed a Divine Person, uniting in Himself two natures, the human and the Divine, then it becomes perfectly intelligible why He is the only avenue of approach to the Father. One Who unites in his own Person the perfections of God and man is naturally the connecting link between

the human and the Divine. But if, on the contrary, He is human and not Divine, then His claim cannot be acquitted from the charge of an intolerable presumption.

2. Another claim of the Son of Man is, to be the *likeness of the Father.*

One day St. Philip asked Him, "Lord, show us the Father, and it sufficeth us." That is, "Grant us a vision of God; let the light of God shine out to dispel our doubts for ever; give us one sight of God, and by the remembrance of that glory we can work on till life is ended."

Now if Jesus were only human, what answer must He give to that petition? Must He not say, "O my disciple, wouldst thou gaze on God? Thy mortal eyes cannot behold Him here. The vision of God is the reward reserved hereafter for His saints. And why dost thou turn to Me to show thee the Father? Ask Him thyself, and He will give thee what is possible for thee to gaze on here.

Now recall the real answer of Christ, "Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father." Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me, Philip? There is in the question an accent of reproach. After this daily companionship with Jesus Christ, the request, show us the Father, ought not to have been made. Already the truth ought to have reached the disciples' mind. However, since this was not the case, let the truth be at once plainly

asserted now—he that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father.

We sometimes say that the family likeness between two brothers is so strong that if you know the one you cannot mistake the other when you meet him. Or we say again, that the opinions of two men are so alike that to know what the one maintains is to know the thoughts of the other. Jesus Christ declares that a strong family likeness exists between Himself and the Father. He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father. Plainly the words mean that He is the very image of God, that the Uncreated is reflected in His person, that He is a personal revelation of the Father, that He is, in a unique, incommunicable way, One who manifests the divine glory. His words, His character, His personality, His innermost self unveil the invisible in such a manner that to understand Him, to realize Him, is nothing less than to understand and to realize God. Remember that the Speaker was a Galilean working man, He of whom He spoke, the Everlasting God. To gaze on Jesus, to come to know the character of Jesus, is to come to know God.

Think of it! The more we repeat those words, the more we reflect upon them, the more their overwhelming claim forces itself upon the mind. "He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father." To think that this claim should ever have come from human lips—"to have seen Me, is to have seen God!" And yet if the Church's conviction be

true, then nothing is more natural than this claim.

3. Another claim of Christ is, to *share the honour due to God*—"that all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father."[1]

Now if there is anything from which the creature must always shrink with abhorrence, it is from receiving an honour due to God alone.

When the simple-minded pagans mistook St. Paul and St. Barnabas for heathen divinities, and desired to offer sacrifice before them, the Apostles could scarcely find words to express their alarm and abhorrence. They rent their clothes, they ran in among the people, they protested, "Sirs, why do ye these things? We are men, of like passions with yourselves, we preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities to serve the living God."

When St. John in the Revelation fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which showed him these things, the answer came upbraidingly, "See thou do it not, I am thy fellowservant . . . . worship God." Now, that St. John intended to pay Divine honour to the angel is not likely. A Jew by birth, a Christian by conviction, an Apostle by Divine grace, he knew the immeasurable gulf which parts the created from the uncreated. But if he did mean that, then the angel utterly rejected it. If, as is more probable, he intended some lower honour consistent with the honour due to God, still even that the angel rejected. Zealous for the

[1] St. John xiv.

honour of God, the pure spirit dwelling before God's throne will not endure even an honour which might be misinterpreted as invading the honour due to God alone.

Now, if Jesus Christ were only human, He, no less than His apostles, and still more than the angel, must sharply distinguish between the honour due to God and any respect permissible to Himself. Yet watch His conduct. After the miracle of the man born blind, Christ sought him out and asked, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" The eager answer was, "Who is He, Lord, that I might believe on Him?" "Thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that talketh with thee." "Lord," he responded, "I believe." And he worshipped Him. Worshipped Him! Of course we cannot say that this man intended to pay Divine honour to Christ any more than that St. John in the Revelation intended to pay Divine honour to the angel. But if Moses was excluded from the Promised Land simply because he allowed the credit of a miracle to rest upon himself, surely the Son of Man must have avoided the peril by which Moses sinned. If an Apostle after a miracle exclaimed, "Why look ye on *us*, as though by our own power or goodness we had made this man to walk?" is above all things anxious to ascribe the glory to God alone, still more must the Son of Man avert from Himself the reverence of men, and direct it to Him Who only doeth wondrous things. Yet this is precisely what Christ omits to do. He permits reverence to

rest upon Himself. He invites it, He seems even to demand it. When honesty compelled the angel to say, "See thou do it not: worship God," Christ allows the man to worship at His feet.

And what still more strongly forces this upon us is the saying, "That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father." What is the honour due to the Father? It is reverence, adoration, worship: the honour due from the creature to the Uncreated. "Ascribe unto the Lord worship and power; give unto the Lord the honour due unto His Name. Worship the Lord with holy worship"—that is the honour due to the Father. But here Jesus Christ proclaims that an equal honour is due to Himself: that *all men*, the entire human race, should honour the Son even as they honour the Father. He claims to share the worship which is due to God alone.

II

These are His claims.

1. Now it may be asked, Are not these claims *modified* by other words of Christ?

For example, if He says, "I and my Father are one," does He not say, "My Father is greater than I?" Consider, then, these words, "My Father is greater than I." They are sometimes quoted as if incompatible with divinity. But surely they contain a lofty claim. For why should He think it necessary to inform the world that the Almighty

God is greater than the Carpenter of Nazareth? To say that the Father is greater than Himself, involves that the Speaker has been placing Himself and the Father in close proximity.

To a believer in the Catholic Faith there is no temptation to modify these words by other words of Christ. "I and My Father are one,"—"My Father is greater than I." Each statement is perfectly consistent with the other, and both are true. He is equal to the Father as touching His Godhead, inferior to the Father as touching His manhood.

Moreover, these claims are *constantly repeated.* What mere human being could address his fellowmen in terms like the following? "Ye are from beneath, I am from above." Or these, "I came forth from the Father, and am come into the world: again, I leave the world, and go to the Father." Or think of the simple but appalling phrase, "*We* will come unto Him and make our abode with Him." We—that is you and I. What can justify that plural of familiarity if the Speaker were nothing but man? Or what can justify His insertion of Himself in the baptismal formula, in the name (not in the names) of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; an association which inevitably led to the formula of worship, "Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost"? He certainly paved the way for His own worship when He joined Himself with the Name of God.

III

Equal with God! Now, when man turns towards God, all claims become impossible. The only reasonable attitude of man before God is simply acknowledgment of his own nothingness, and adoring recognition of God's perfection and glory.

"My God, how wonderful Thou art,
Thy majesty how bright,
How beautiful Thy mercy-seat
In depths of burning light!

How dread are Thine eternal years,
O Everlasting Lord,
By prostrate spirits day and night
Incessantly adored!

How wonderful, how beautiful
The sight of Thee must be,
Thine endless wisdom, boundless power,
And awful purity!"

It is in strains like these that the emotions of the creature before the Throne of the Uncreated find expression. Before the Eternal God everything human sinks away into utter nothingness. God, the self-existent; God, the most ancient of all mysteries, lifted above the narrow limits of space and time, liable to no fluctuations, no change; the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever; a Power which has no limits save what are self-imposed; a knowledge before which lies open all that is, has been, shall be, or can be; a holiness which silences all comparison—before this majestic Source of all power, all wisdom, all goodness, the spirit of man sinks down silenced, overwhelmed, afraid.

1. Man cannot claim equality with God were it only for the *absurdity* of the claim. The fly on the chariot-wheel said, "See what a dust I make!" The claim was rational compared with a human claim of equality with the Uncreated. For the distance between the lowest creation and man is measurable, while that between man and God is not. Now Christ beyond all question made that claim. Think, then, if untrue, of its absurdity.

Any man who has once grasped, even in the most rudimentary degree, the distinction between the Infinite and the finite, the Divine and the human, God and the creature, cannot cross that awful chasm and imagine himself equal with God. And the more he understands of God, the more impossible that comparison becomes. Even the *heathen* understood this. It is true that they enrolled their emperors after death among the host of minor deities. But how did the matter appear to the victims of this strange elevation? We learn that it was ludicrous. A Roman emperor dangerously ill was heard to say that if he didn't soon grow better he was in a fair way to secure his own divinity. The absurdity of it struck the dying man as standing in piteous contrast to life's painful realities.

And if a heathen understood it, still more was the contrast between God and the creature obvious to a *Jew*. Trained in the magnificent conception of God embodied in the olden Scripture, he knew that clouds and darkness are round about Him;

that "great is our Lord, and great is His power: yea, and His wisdom is infinite." He would exclaim with the Psalmist, "What is man, that Thou art mindful of him: and the son of man, that thou visitest him? Man is like a thing of naught: his time passeth away like a shadow." For any human being to claim equality with God was to a Jewish mind to cover himself with derision and contempt.

And further, if that contrast between God and man was overwhelmingly clear to the mind of any Israelite, still more was it clear to the mind of Jesus Christ. For certainly no one understood God as Jesus Christ understood Him. Think how He teaches us the Fatherhood of God, the glory of God and His holy Angels; that God is a Spirit, and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth.

And yet He Who knows God best is He Who claimed to be God's equal. He Who, of all that ever lived, must have been overwhelmed by the absurdity of the claim, unless it were the simple truth.

2. But consider not only the absurdity of the claim, if false; but also what is even more significant, *its awful irreverence.*

Reverence for God is eminently characteristic of the heart of an Israelite; it is the very spirit of their religion—nothing impressed an Israelite more than the unapproachable majesty of God. Nothing wounded his sense of reverence more deeply than invasion of the glory or of the honour of God.

Reverence for God, if characteristic of the Religion of Israel, is still more characteristic of *the Religion taught by Christ.* Remember how He taught that that which is born of the flesh is flesh, and that nothing less than entire Regeneration was needed before a human being could enter the precincts of the Kingdom of God. Humility, reverence, fear, these were essentials for approach to sacred things. The whole attitude of man to God must be one of holy reverence and godly fear. Can that Religion of which reverence is the very soul, contain in its inmost spirit the gross irreverence of setting the creature in the Creator's place?

Reflect still more how *Christ Himself* was invariably jealous for His Father's honour—"O righteous Father, the world hath not known Thee. . . ." Think how He drove the traders from the Temple Courts, because irreverence may not invade the merest fringe of sacred things!

And yet He Who was always keen and sensitive to all that wounded the Divine honour, and spoke in awful terms of the honour due to God alone, and said among His latest utterances, "I have glorified Thee on the earth"—nevertheless claimed equality with God.

Did He then cast out irreverence from the Temple Courts only to enthrone it in the Holiest Place? What was the irreverence of the trading men in those outer courts compared with that of One Who, if nothing more than human, throned Himself amid the Holiest of all, making Himself

equal with God! How could He glorify God on the earth, if being only man He claimed to be God's equal? No really good man could speak in terms like these. Such words, such claims would be utterly repudiated from the heart in proportion to the moral worth of him to whom they were suggested.

This is the astounding wonder of it. No heart so good as Christ's. And yet no claim so high as Christ's. The lowliest, the humblest, the purest that ever breathed, is the One Who claims equality with God.

Now it is morally impossible that He, being what He was, could make that claim unless He believed that the claim was true. Certainly Jesus Christ was sincere. He believed that He was equal with God.

But there is here no room for self-deception. No mere human being *can* believe himself equal with God. The more devout he is, the more impossible such a claim. His creaturely limitations, his frailty, his dependence, the reverence of his soul, his knowledge of himself—all these are insurmountable barriers between a human being and Divine claims. Yet Jesus made that claim.

Here then is the *moral* test of the claim of Christ. Can that claim be rejected? But to reject it is to deny that Christ was good. It is to place Him morally below the rank of men who had more reverence than to make that claim. It is to say against Him much more than we will put in words. But we cannot deny that Christ was good.

Whenever the moral sense of humanity is able to appreciate moral splendour, then it must always rest with satisfaction and with reverence upon the moral glory of Jesus Christ. We cannot deny His goodness: we must accept His claim.

To this line of thought there is only one powerful objection. The objection is that to regard the Son of Man as equal with God, is to say that God is more than one person. But while to believe that God is one person is easy, to believe that He is more than one person is exceedingly hard. That is the objection: to some minds the Unitarian Creed seems reasonable, the Christian contradictory. Reason asserts that God is one: how can He be three?

But *is* the Unitarian theory of one Divine Person so simple after all? Consider. You believe that God is love. Well, then, in eternity whom did God love? Was it the human race? It did not exist. Was it the angels? They were not created. And even if they had existed, no creature can be an adequate object for a love uncreated; the finite cannot satisfy the Infinite. Whom then did God love? Was it Himself? When you say that God is love, do you only mean that He possessed a capacity for love, a capacity never called forth into reality for lack of a worthy object upon which it might repose? Does not love demand an object? Does not love demand an equal? None but a Divine Person could be a worthy object of a love which is Divine. If God be one

Person, and only one, then love in God is and must eternally remain an unexercised capacity. But if in the nature of God exists more than one Divine personality, then the love of the Father finds an adequate object in the infinite perfections of His Son.

So far, then, from being easier to believe that God is one Person, it is more in harmony with the demands of the intellect to believe that there is more than one Person in the nature of God.

Thus the affirmation of Jesus Christ agrees with the deepest reasonings about God.

We reach the end to which our thoughts on the Son of Man have led us. Step by step we have followed His own self-revelation. We listened with wonder to the words of His predictions. We came nearer to contemplate His character, and we saw with deepest reverence His sublimity in word and teaching, His moral goodness, His absolute freedom from that which discolours and distorts every human life but His. And in the light of that awful moral purity we have heard His claims—claims upon the human race and claims towards God.

And now at last we leave all argument and reasoning, and place ourselves in unreserved adoring worship before His sacred Feet, adding our voices to the Hymn of the Christian ages—"Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ. Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father."

THE END

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